

## Reviews

T. S. M. Elwyn: *The Northamptonshire Baptist Association*. 126 pp. 7s. 6d. Carey Kingsgate Press.

F. Buffard, *The Kent and Sussex Baptist Associations*. 160 pp. and 17 illustrations. 7s. 6d. Obtainable from Mrs. E. Vinson, Sandbanks, Faversham, Kent.

It is a pleasant task to be able to review two Association histories at the same time.

Probably most people would be more likely to anticipate that, of the two, the history of the Northampton Association would be the more interesting and detailed. In the event, the reverse turns out to be the fact. Mr. Buffard's book seems more effectively to come to grips with the basic issues and to carry the reader along much more easily than does Mr. Elwyn's. Nevertheless, what is certain is that every serious student of Baptist History must read these two books.

Mr. Buffard's story is the longer and the more complex, and the author tells us just the sort of things we want and need to know. He records, for example, exactly what happened at the Kent and Sussex Particular Baptist Association meeting at Bessell's Green in 1796 from 3.0 p.m. on the Tuesday until 7.0 p.m. on the Wednesday. There is a constant assessment as to the value which our Fathers placed upon Association Meetings. He illustrates clearly how the earlier Baptists found fellowship. Writing of the eighteenth century he says: "The sense of the oneness of their churches was strengthened as the reports from the churches were read and the concern of one became the concern of all. Unity was often shown in practical ways. Churches drew up plans for their pastors to supply a ministry to pastorless churches. Special cases of need, as when a meeting house needed to be built, were considered and, if approved, the churches were urged to subscribe and the minister of the church was given authorisation to collect from churches outside the area." (P. 58.) We are shown, too, how the Association exercised a reconciling and unifying influence and how it functioned as a guide and counsellor. The past can still remind the present.

Mr. Buffard weaves together skilfully the stories of the founding of the various churches—stories which are full of interest. Moreover, he records in the pages of his history names hitherto unknown to most of us but which are obviously worthy of remembrance. People like G. A. Miller, one of Spurgeon's students, who came to

Rochester with no local group to welcome and support him, who began open air work and amongst other things taught Rochester policemen to swim! Not surprisingly such enterprise was rewarded and in two years he had members enough for a church and remained as minister for thirty-eight years.

Future Association historians—of which we hope there will be many—might well take Mr. Buffard's work as a model.

Mr. Elwyn's book starts interestingly enough with the first five chapters having titles bringing us from Pre-Association days up to the period of change 1833-35. Yet within these chapters much is stated but not detailed. Particularly is there insufficient reference to John Gill, who was at St. Albans in the latter half of the eighteenth century and who followed his more distinguished uncle in strict Calvinism. One wonders how he got on with Andrew Fuller?

Of particular interest to us today is the Circular Letter of 1833 drawn up by Rev. William Gay entitled "The Best Means of Rendering Associations Efficient." Amongst the quotations which Mr. Elwyn gives is this one: "The spirit of independency, all scriptural and rational as it is, may be carried too far, and is pushed beyond its legitimate limits, when we refuse to ask, or tender advice. . . . By the gentleness of admonition, the wisdom of instruction, and the tenderness of sympathy, an efficiency will be stamped upon our Associations and the purity and harmony of our separate churches promoted." (p. 39.)

The Chapters 6-12 read rather much as catalogues of churches and people though within them there is useful material, particularly the pin-pointing of many social issues by Association Assemblies and effective resolutions passed and forwarded to public men and governments. Once again, yesterday could well prod today on these matters.

Thank goodness that both books have indices and are very well produced—Mr. Buffard's most especially so with many excellent illustrations from photographs by T. A. H. Getley and 160 pages for 7s. 6d!

W. M. S. WEST

Stephen Neill: *The Interpretation of the New Testament, 1861-1961*. 360 pp. 45s. Oxford University Press.

The theological student beginning his studies is so hard pressed to keep up with recent books that he has little or no time to read those of a previous era. Yet only by knowing the background can he ever hope to understand the modern theological scene. Certainly no layman can hope to walk purposefully, unless with an expert guide, through the vast complexity of New Testament

studies, from linguistics to historicity and Rabbinics to eschatology.

Mercifully there are such expert guides, with whom the student may begin and the layman may walk; but they usually limit their skills to a comparatively narrow field. Only very seldom does one attempt such a comprehensive task as that undertaken by Bishop Stephen Neill in the Firth Lectures for 1962. The conception, the plan, the writing and the quality of the book are alike excellent.

The story begins in 1860 with the challenge to orthodoxy, the Tübingen school, the establishment of German influence in Britain and the dawning of the era of that great Biblical trio, Lightfoot, Wescott, and Hort. Our debt to those who first ascertained a reliable Greek text of the New Testament and introduced detailed linguistic study is here made plain.

We are ably led by Bishop Neill through the studies lying behind Streeter's *The Four Gospels* and Harnack's *Das Wesen des Christentums*. The increase of knowledge due to the discovery of inscriptions and papyri is assessed and the massive researches of Sir William Ramsay reported; we learn of the many and various estimates of the extent of Gnostic, Hellenistic and Jewish influence on the New Testament.

The whole book is readable, particularly the chapter entitled "Re-Enter Theology," in which Schweitzer, Barth, Hoskyns (perhaps a little surprisingly) and Bultmann are introduced with appreciation and criticism. The section on Bultmann is particularly useful.

With due recognition of the work of R. H. Lightfoot in mediating to British readers the intricacies of the *Formgeschichte Methode*, of the formative insights of C. H. Dodd and the careful scholarship of Vincent Taylor, we see the background of the new quest for the historical Jesus, a development as vital as it is unexpected.

The final chapter "Salvation is of the Jews" assesses the relevance of the Qumran texts to New Testament studies, the most recent contributions to research on the Fourth Gospel and the "large stone (which) was thrown with great violence into the calm pool of Biblical studies"—Barr's *Semantics of Biblical Language*.

In his conclusion the author lists twelve achievements of New Testament scholarship since 1861 and indicates a further twelve areas in which there is stimulus and scope for work now.

This is a remarkable piece of work by one who is at home in classical and European languages, who can detect the really important issue and expound it, who has the restraint to avoid judgment where none is called for, and who writes with sympathy and affection of many of the great scholars of the past and present.

Although criticism might seem an impertinence, a few observations may be made on points of interest to the critic. On p. 162 we read, "The Mandæans are a small quasi-Christian sect living

in Mesopotamia . . ." but on pp. 177-8 ". . . the books of the Mandæans, that strongly anti-Christian Gnostic sect which still so strangely survives. . . ."

One curious omission is mention of the extensive baptismal controversy in Britain throughout the nineteenth century, especially as it provoked vigorous Patristic study and widespread analysis of manuscript evidence. The modern counterpart of that earlier debate is not dealt with.

Perhaps *preaching* in its own right has influenced New Testament study enough to merit a comment and we should want to make reference now to the possible significance of mechanical aids to linguistic studies.

But when the reader begins to think "I would have put in so-and-so and assessed this or that development" it is only because Bishop Neill has done his work in a stimulating as well as a competent manner. 45s. is a lot of money to pay for a book, but in this case it is well spent.

J. R. C. PERKIN

John Baillie: *Baptism and Conversion*. 121 pp. 15s. Oxford University Press.

This is a series of lectures delivered by the late John Baillie in 1955 in Buenos Aires and later at three universities in the United States, and published by his widow.

Professor Baillie begins by quoting Stephen Neill and his anti-thesis—(a) Conversion is the beginning of the Christian life, (b) Christian life begins at baptism. He examines this divergence, first by looking at baptism and its relation to regeneration, and then at conversion.

After examining the teaching of the various churches on baptism and regeneration, he sums up by saying one cannot doubt that the universal New Testament view is that "Christian life begins at baptism." The outward rite and inward renewal properly accompany one another. He allows that the actual washing of itself accomplishes nothing. It is significant "only when it accompanies the effective reception of the initiate into the Christian community, which is the Body of Christ." On the other hand, we must not regard the washing with water merely as pleasant formality. Of infant baptism, he states that only the children of Christian parents living in a Christian home or within a Christian congregation can be baptised, only so can the child be received effectively into the Christian community. Such a statement must help those Anglican brethren who are fighting the practice of indiscriminate baptism, and also makes us Baptists think about our caring for the young converts we baptise.

The next two sections examine pre-Christian conversion and the teaching of the churches on conversion, then he asks what is the nature of conversion. John Baillie distinguishes three types of conversion the crisis of self-surrender, the transference of religious allegiance, and the call to an office or a discipline. One might experience any or all of these types of conversion. Asking is a conversion experience necessary, he answers that what matters is not whether a person is converted but what they are converted to, whether they have the mind of Christ. There are those baptised who grow into full Christian life, others will fall away and need to come back to commitment by some form of conversion experience. But what is vital is that "by whatever steps and stages, and through whatever experiences, we should now be definitely committed."

This small book puts us again into John Baillie's debt and will influence the current discussion on baptism.

T. S. H. ELWYN

G. F. Whitley: *The Prophetic Achievement*. 224 pp. 21 guilders.  
E. J. Brill, Leiden.

In his preface the author describes this book as "An attempt . . . to assess the contribution of the great prophets to Hebrew religious thought." The prophets with whose writings he deals are those from Amos to Deutero-Isaiah (with slight reference to Zephaniah, less still to Nahum, and none to Habakkuk), and he is at pains to emphasise the originality of their teaching and its relevance to the situations of their times. This he does in eight chapters, with an appendix on "Pre-exilic Prophecy and Eschatology" followed by indexes of subjects and authors, but none of scriptural references.

Unfortunately, what good qualities there are in the book are rather more than outweighed by its faults, which are considerable. There can be no doubt as to the author's interest in and enthusiasm for his subject, nor as to his ability generally to express himself in language which is pleasing to read. In his evaluation of the prophetic achievement, however, Dr. Whitley harks back to positions held a generation or more ago, and in so doing is frequently at odds with more recent scholarship. Much of what he has to say has elsewhere, in various ways, and, often more effectively, already been said. It is a duty of scholarship to advance rather than to retreat, certainly not (as the writer of this book appears to do) to set aside, without the fullest and most careful examination, conclusions resulting from the work of a whole era of scholarly research. Indeed, what is here required in such a contribution are the mastery and control of the vast range of literature pertaining

to the field concerned. Instead of this, the reader is presented with citation after citation from various sources, often quite arbitrarily chosen and not in all cases relevant to the issue under consideration. Again and again one discerns the tendency to over-simplify a keenly debated question, and at times the author's method of discussing his subject has the effect of obscuring his argument, which he does not always pursue to a clearly stated conclusion. Seldom does he come to terms with the most authoritative works in his field. Especially is this the case where he considers the nature and originality of the prophets. On the relation of the prophets to the cultus one is surprised to find merely a secondary and quite casual reference to so significant a contribution as A. R. Johnson's "The Cultic Prophet in Ancient Israel."

He is seemingly at his best in dealing with repentance and grace and with fulfilment in service, where to a large extent he lets the prophets, as it were, speak for themselves, but the most obvious defects of the book are its misprints which extend from the inside wrapper and continue almost throughout, being especially noticeable in the page headings of Chapter Seven. One need not go beyond the first few pages to discover wrong textual citations and misquotation of authors. On p. 5 the way in which A. Lods is alluded to suggests that the passage in question has not been carefully read, and on p. 7 the quotation from H. Knight has a number of words missing, which are necessary to the sense of the sentence and vital to the argument in which it is cited.

E. T. RYDER

### LIST OF BOOKS RECEIVED

- Roger Thomas: *Daniel Williams 'Presbyterian Bishop.'* 24 pp. 4s. 6d. Dr. Williams's Trust.
- John A. Newton: *Methodism and the Puritans.* 19 pp. 4s. 6d. Dr. Williams's Trust.
- Patrick Collinson: *A Mirror of Elizabethan Puritanism.* 35 pp. 6s. Dr. Williams's Trust.
- P. N. Harrison: *Paulines and Pastorals.* 141 pp. 25s. Villiers Publications.
- Paul Tillich: *Theology of Culture.* 213 pp. 9s. Now as a Galaxy Book, Oxford University Press.
- The Bible in Basic English*, with 32 illustrations. 15s. Cambridge University Press.